

AOA: Gulf Coast



Comments Open until Feb. 20

What is an Aquaculture Opportunity Area (and what is it not)?

- ▶ NOAA's Office of Aquaculture developed the AOA process to assess domestic regions for potential future development of aquaculture production in federal waters.
- ▶ An AOA is a defined geographic area that has been evaluated to determine its potential suitability for commercial aquaculture. Data collected through scientific analysis and multiple phases of public engagement will help the agency identify areas within the AOA that may be environmentally, socially, and economically appropriate for commercial aquaculture.
- ▶ This process is NOT regulatory. It does not trigger permitting or alter the permitting process, nor does it authorize, implement or expand any aquaculture activities.
- ▶ However, the information gathered and formalized through this process may be incorporated into future permit



applications. Stakeholder input is vital to ensuring that the process is and continues to be based on robust data.

What is a Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement?

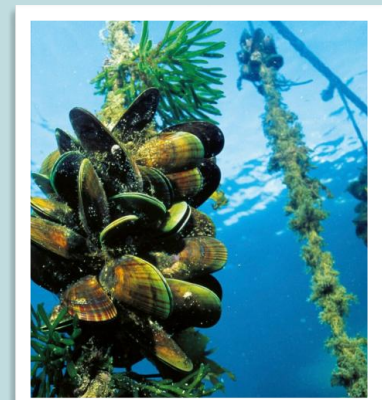
- ▶ A draft PEIS provides a full description of the affected environment as well as the potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of identifying AOAs in the region.
- ▶ The draft is a requirement of the NEPA (the National Environmental Policy Act) process and is now open to public comment before it is formalized.

WHERE ARE WE IN THE PROCESS?

Information Gathering & Drafting | Request for public input; engagement with stakeholder groups and management; collection of siting data for regional Aquaculture Atlas; drafting Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement.

Public Comment | Collection of feedback on draft PEIS through written and verbal comments.

Publication | Notice of Intent for formalized EIS.



PUBLIC COMMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Written | Comments can be submitted in writing via mail, email or at [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) (see contact info below).

Virtual Listening Sessions*

Dec. 17, 2024, 6:30-8:30 p.m. CST/7:30-9:30 p.m. EST

Jan. 15, 2025, 3:30-5:30 p.m. CST/4:30-6:30 p.m. EST

Feb. 13, 2025, 6:30-8:30 p.m. CST/7:30-9:30 p.m. EST | [Register](#)

**Session recordings will be linked here when available.*



**Should I give feedback?
YES!**

If you:

Are a fisherman in this region

Work with fishermen

Buy, sell, distribute domestic seafood

Are a fishing community stakeholder

Your feedback can help strengthen local working waterfronts and community-based fisheries.

Robust working waterfronts are critical to our domestic seafood supply, which affects all of us, from fishermen to retailers and distributors, to consumers and community members.

Stakeholders looking to invest in aquaculture and mariculture may rely on your input on existing practices, resources and infrastructure in the permitting phase.

How will this information be used?

- ▶ To develop and expand regional recommendations for existing and potential and marine resource production through aquaculture — within the areas identified.

What kind of feedback can you provide?

- ▶ The AOA process is new, so NOAA's Office of Aquaculture is learning about the region's infrastructure and marine industries while also adapting the process of information-gathering before publication.
- ▶ Local knowledge is key to defining and refining the information used to establish the parameters of the AOAs.
- ▶ Your input now could affect local and domestic fisheries and the seafood supply chain for years to come.

Who is most affected by the AOAs?

- ▶ All fishery participants and working waterfront communities in the region.
- ▶ This opportunity is particularly valuable for smaller-scale fisheries stakeholders who typically have less access to federal managers and policymakers.

1

COMMENT DEADLINE

**Thursday,
February 20, 2025**

2

SUBMIT ONLINE

[www.regulations.gov/
commenton/NOAA-
NMFS-2024-0135-0001](https://www.regulations.gov/commenton/NOAA-NMFS-2024-0135-0001)
Or via email
[nmfs.ser.aquaculture@
noaa.gov](mailto:nmfs.ser.aquaculture@noaa.gov)

3

SUBMIT VIA MAIL

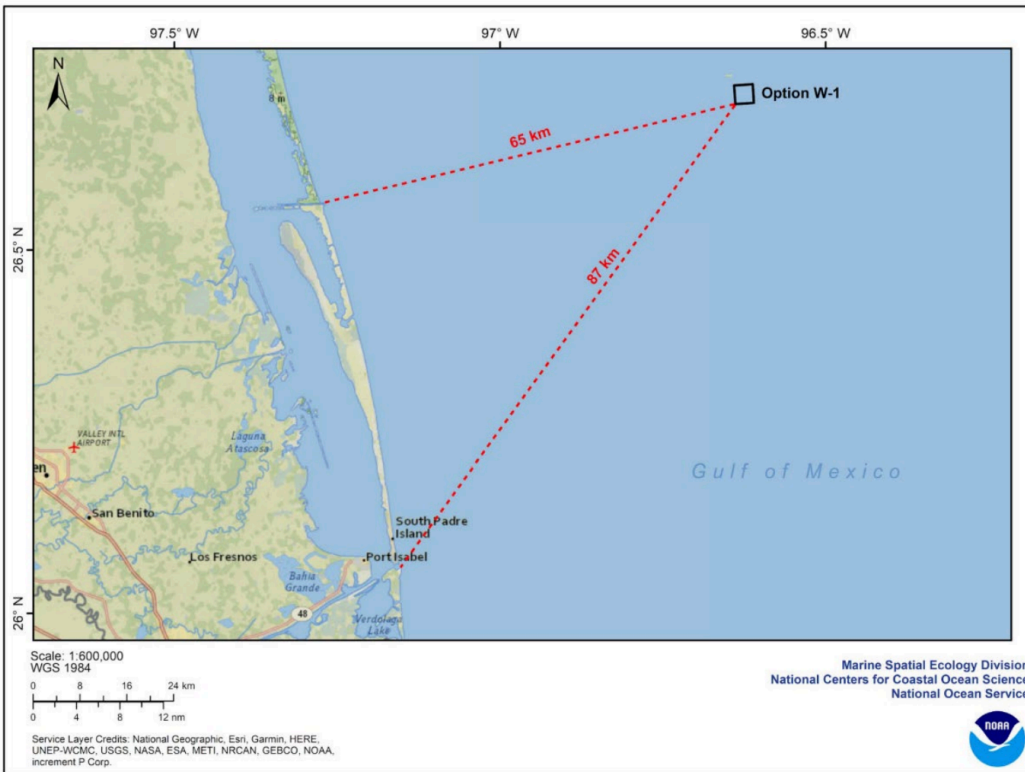
Andrew Richard
RAC, NMFS SERO
263 13th Ave. South
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

Key Proposals of the Draft PEIS

- ▶ This draft includes four Preferred Alternatives and one Non-Preferred Alternative.
- ▶ Each of the Preferred Alternatives includes analysis for all types of commercial aquaculture, including finfish, shellfish, macroalgae or multispecies operations.
- ▶ The analysis in this document does not change the aquaculture permitting process, nor does it alter regulations of aquaculture in federal waters.

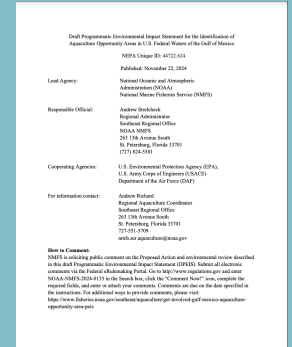
Alternatives

- ▶ **Alternative 1 is no action:** No recommendations on AOAs from NOAA.
- ▶ **Alternative 2** Option W-1 is in the vicinity of Port Mansfield, South Padre Island and Port Isabel, Texas. This 2,000-acre area would be considered potentially suitable for all types of commercial aquaculture, including finfish, shellfish, macroalgae or multispecies operations.

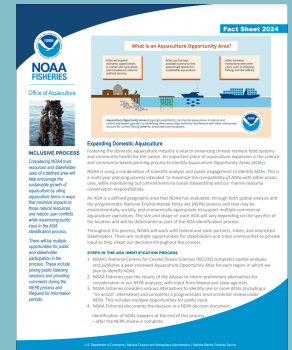


Key Documents

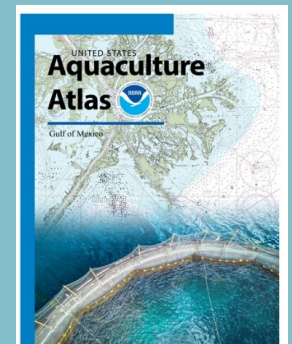
Draft PEIS



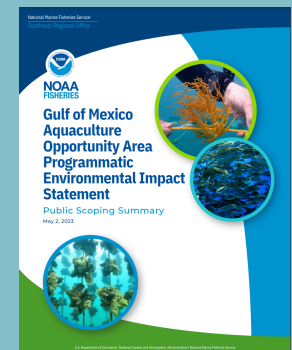
AOA Fact Sheet



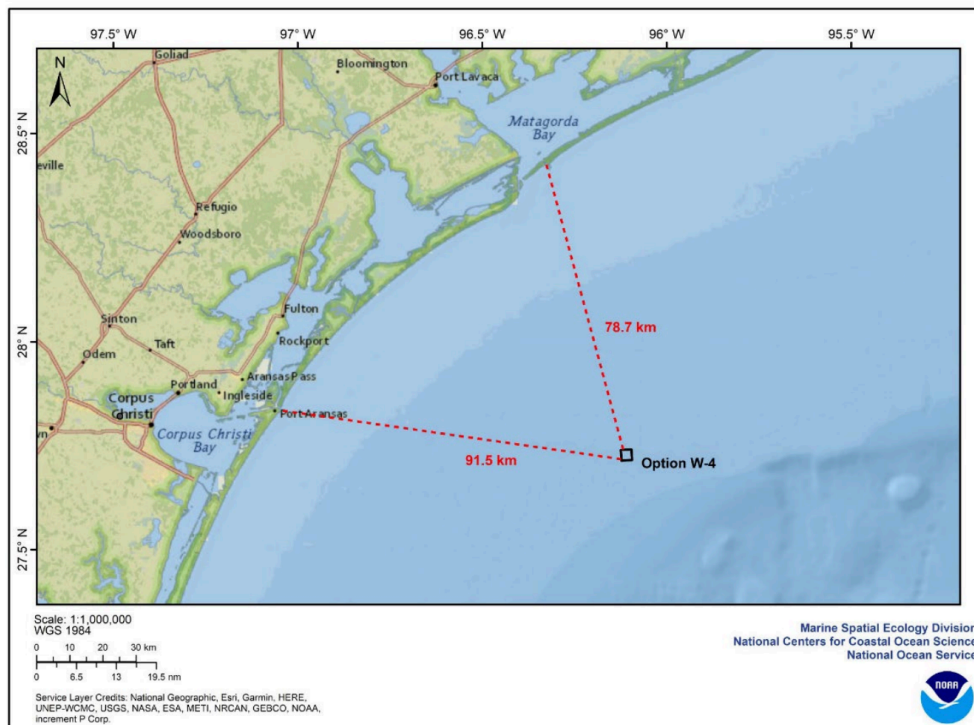
Regional Atlas



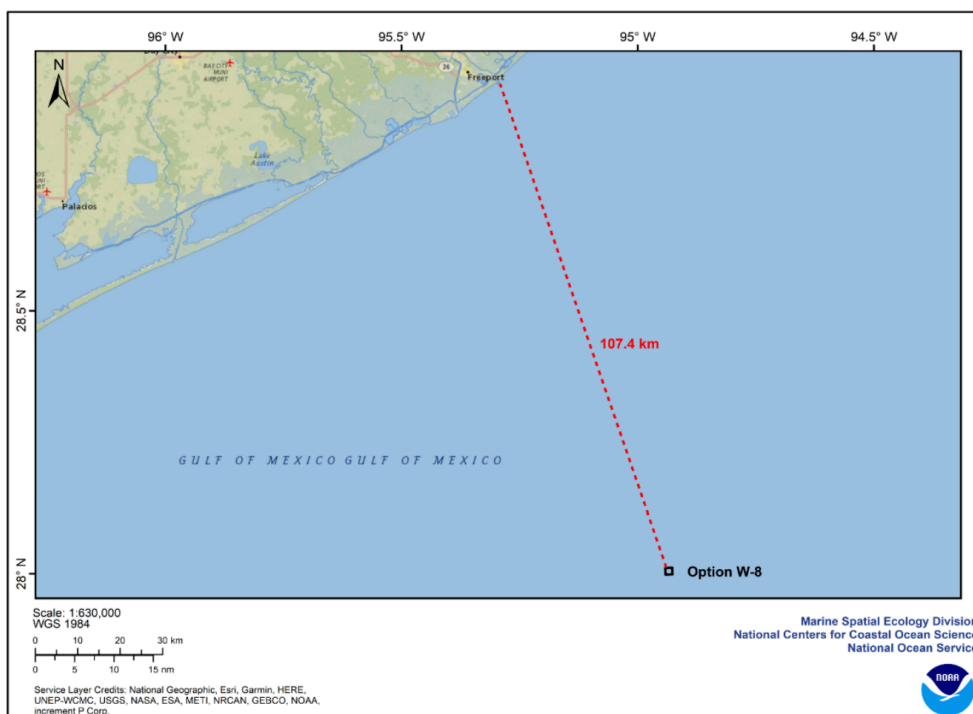
Scoping Report



- ▶ **Alternative 3** Option W-4 is in the vicinity of Matagorda and Port Aransas, Texas. This 2,000-acre area would be considered potentially suitable for all types of commercial aquaculture, including finfish, shellfish, macroalgae or multispecies operations.



- ▶ **Alternative 4** Option W-8 is in the vicinity of Freeport, Texas. This 500-acre area would be considered potentially suitable for all types of commercial aquaculture, including finfish, shellfish, macroalgae or multispecies operations.



AOA Timeline

May 7, 2020

President Trump signs Executive Order 13921, Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth.

May 2020

NMFS initiates public outreach to gather input from stakeholders.

October 2020

A Request for Information is published in the Federal Register, inviting public input on identifying AOAs in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico and Southern California.

November 2021

NMFS publishes spatial modeling analysis: Aquaculture Atlas.

June 2022

NMFS publishes a Notice of Intent for this PEIS, opening a 60-day public comment period.

Nov. 22, 2024

NMFS begins a 90-day public comment period for the draft PEIS.

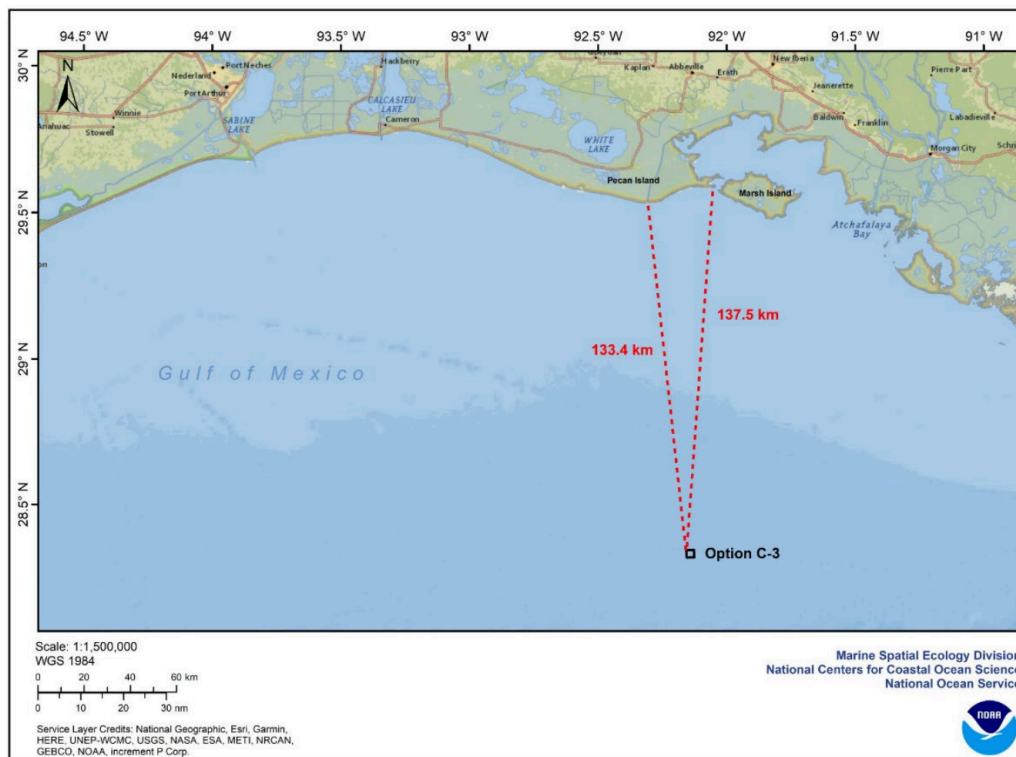
Feb. 20, 2025

The 90-day public comment period for the draft PEIS closes.

TBD in 2025

NMFS will analyze and respond to substantive public comments on the draft PEIS. If the decision is to proceed, NMFS will publish a final PEIS based on public input and the revised analysis.

- ▶ **Alternative 5** Option C-3 is in the vicinity of Pecan Island and Marsh Island, Louisiana. This 2,000-acre area would be considered potentially suitable for all types of commercial aquaculture, including finfish, shellfish, macroalgae or multispecies operations.



Why Should You Comment?

- ▶ **Your Input Matters.** Your feedback is critical to ensure the analysis accurately reflects the potential impacts — both positive and negative — on your business, coastal community, and the seafood supply chain.
- ▶ **A Final Chance to Weigh In.** This is your last opportunity to formally contribute before the analysis is finalized.

Topics of Interest

- ▶ **Commercial fishing** (Section 4.5.1) starts on page **225**
- ▶ **Seafood markets** (Section 4.5.2) starts on page **229**

Specific Community Impact Scores

- ▶ Communities in **Louisiana** starts on page **254**
- ▶ Communities in **Texas** starts on page **257**

State-Level Analysis of Fisheries and Aquaculture Production

- ▶ **Texas** starts on page **109**
- ▶ **Louisiana** starts on page **112**

Who We Are



Established in 2017. Our team of lifelong commercial fishing industry leaders is based in Alaska, Seattle, Montana and Maine, with a constant connection to Washington, DC.

We specialize in American fisheries management, aquaculture policy and the seafood supply chain. We aim to connect diverse ocean stakeholders and influential leaders around today's most pressing fishery and seafood issues.



The Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance is a fishermen's organization run by fishermen. Everything we do is founded in our belief that conservation and stewardship protect fish populations and fishermen's businesses. We do this from the ground up as commercial fishermen creating positive change.